



A STATEMENT BY H.E. GÉRALD CYPRIEN CARDINAL LACROIX Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada

**Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré,
July 26 2020, on the Feast of Saint Anne, Patron Saint of Quebec**

The situation we have been confronted with since last March has not been easy for anyone, neither you nor us. No one had anticipated such a pandemic and no one had a plan to face up to it. We had to develop one as the situation progressed. All of us have done our best to protect the health of the faithful, ordained ministers, and coworkers in the various sectors of the life of our Church.

This has forced us to make difficult and demanding decisions. I am aware that closure of our places of worship and the cancellation of many pastoral activities have upset many people. To be deprived of celebrating the Eucharist, Eucharistic communion, and other sacraments for almost four months has been very painful, both for the faithful and for the pastors, as well as for pastoral teams.

Many of you have been asking questions about the commitment of the bishops of Quebec throughout this pandemic: “WHAT are our bishops doing? Are they working in dialogue with the public health authorities and the Government of Quebec to promote our needs and ensure that believers are considered?”

I can assure you that from the very first hours of this pandemic, the Catholic bishops of Quebec have made great efforts to enter into dialogue with the authorities. It was very difficult for us to be heard. We took the initiative to bring together leaders of other faith communities: Catholics, Anglicans, Evangelical Christians, Jews, and Muslims, to reflect together and let the public health authorities and the Government of

Quebec know that we wanted to collaborate by passing on instructions to our faithful so that this evil virus spreads as little as possible. From the very beginning, and throughout the last few months, we have proved to be team players, wishing to play our part for the good of society and to participate in the collective effort in this time of crisis. It was necessary for us to be in solidarity, and we have been.

Unfortunately, we are forced to conclude that there has been little or no recognition of all these efforts. Faith communities, of whatever denomination, do not seem to be worthy of the attention of our elected representatives or the public health authorities. This leaves me with the impression that the government authorities are not taking us seriously and that they deliberately ignore our existence.

We have never been able to establish a frank and direct dialogue with government nor public health officials. Our contacts have been continually limited to third parties. We have worked out and submitted protocols for possible measures of ending confinement measures. We learned, from third parties, that these protocols were well prepared and developed, but never have we received a formal announcement that they had been accepted.

On two occasions, during news conferences held with the Premier and the Director of Public Health, it took questions from journalists to find out what was happening with places of worship. This is the only way we have been able to receive, doled out in drops, some partial information concerning us. In the Government of Quebec's planning chart, published on May 25, we learned that after the preliminary phase, after phases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, in the item called "Subsequent Phases," appeared "places of worship," alongside bars and cruises. In my humble opinion, this is clearly disappointing.

That we be prevented from celebrating Christian funerals in our large churches while funeral homes were quickly allowed to offer funeral rites in their small parlours caused much misunderstanding. It appears as if there were double standards. Despite our protests, the authorities have always turned a blind eye to this reality.

While throughout the pandemic the sale of alcohol and cannabis was considered an essential service, faith communities, which undoubtedly we consider capable of offering an essential service to the community, were virtually ignored. Even casinos have been granted,

before us, the right to accommodate 250 people in areas much smaller than our churches. Unbelievable!

Spiritual needs are an integral part of human life for those who express the need for them— and there are still many of those in Quebec; all of these people deserve to be treated with respect, to be given consideration by their government. Our faith communities are not simply places to pray. They are also places where one can find support. They offer aid at social, family, and human levels.

I confess that the timidity with which our government avoids undertaking any form of open and measured dialogue with the leaders of faith communities doesn't appear healthy for our society in Quebec. Let me be clear: we aren't begging the government for any favour or privilege. Believers are regular citizens, women and men who are fully committed in many aspects of society in the Quebec we love. We have the right to be treated with respect and not ignored or relegated to item VARIA.

To date, we still have to negotiate week after week with the authorities; they are trying to impose restrictions on us that go beyond reasonable.

In this basilica today, as in all our of places of worship, teams have been working very hard, putting in place the sanitary measures that have been ordered, such as the washing of hands, the wearing of a face mask, physical distancing of two metres between people, continuous cleaning between the celebrations. I am very proud of the major work our teams have accomplished.

But please, let us breathe! Over the past four months, we have solidly proven our good faith and our willingness to collaborate entirely with the authorities. Do not abuse our patience, and stop ignoring our existence and our sense of responsibility.

Please excuse me for taking so much time on this issue on the feast of Saint Anne. But I wanted you to know that the bishops have been very active and committed, on your behalf, and on behalf of all the faith communities in Quebec. As pastors, it is our responsibility to do so and we want to do it well. Just because we haven't yet been able to be heard doesn't mean that we are giving up. And this doesn't only apply to our Catholic community, but also to the well-being of all the communities of

faith, for the quality of the way that the people of Quebec wish to live together.

After 400 years of presence, of commitment and partnership in building this nation, it just isn't right to treat communities of faith in this manner. Our involvement in building up Quebec is not insignificant. We are proud of our contribution and we have no intention of entrenching ourselves in our sacristies. The mission of the Church is to be at the heart of society; this is where the disciples of Jesus must bear witness to the faith that animates and sustains them, in order to be alongside their brothers and sisters, believers or unbelievers, all together to work together for the good of this nation.

The state is secular, but society is not! In our beloved Quebec, believers and unbelievers live together. All must be respected because everyone has a right to their place. Brothers and sisters, count on us to continue to seek paths of dialogue. This is the most promising way to continue the road together, in harmony, respect and peace.

Gérald C. Cardinal Lacroix
Archbishop of Quebec